

WE CLAIM:

1. A computer program product operable to control a computer to issue an alert
5 for an out-of-date update status of a malware scanner, said computer program product
comprising:

(i) reading logic operable to read an update status field associated with a
computer file to be scanned by a current malware scanner, said update status field
being indicative of an update status of a previous malware scanner that has scanned
10 said computer file and associated said update status field with said computer file;

(ii) comparison logic operable to compare said update status of said
previous malware scanner with an update status of said current malware scanner; and

(iii) alert issuing logic operable if said update status of said current
malware scanner does not match said update status of said previous malware scanner
15 to issue an update status alert indicative of an out-of-date update status for whichever
one of said current malware scanner and said previous malware scanner has a most
out-of-date update status.

2. A computer program product as claimed in claim 1, wherein said update status
20 field is included as a property field within said computer file.

3. A computer program product as claimed in claim 1, wherein said update status
field is included within an update status file passed together and associated with said
computer file between malware scanners.

4. A computer program product as claimed in claim 3, wherein said update status
file and said computer file are combined into a combined file that is passed as a single
entity between malware scanners.

5. A computer program product as claimed in claim 4, wherein said combined
30 file is a file compressed combination of said update status file and said computer file.

6. A computer program product as claimed in claim 1, wherein, if said current
malware scanner has a less out-of-date update status than said previous malware

scanner, then said update status field associated with said computer file is changed to correspond to said current malware scanner.

7. A computer program product as claimed in claim 6, wherein changes to said update status field are logged in an update status tracking database.

8. A computer program product as claimed in claim 1, wherein said update status alert includes one or more of:

- (i) a user alert issued on whichever one of said current malware scanner and said previous malware scanner has a most out-of-date update status; and
- (ii) an administrator alert issued to an administrator of whichever one of said current malware scanner and said previous malware scanner has a most out-of-date update status.

9. A computer program product as claimed in claim 1, wherein said computer file is an e-mail attachment.

10. A computer program product as claimed in claim 1, wherein said current malware scanner and said previous malware scanner are part of a tiered malware scanner.

11. A computer program product as claimed in claim 1, wherein said update status field includes one or more of:

- (i) a malware scanner computer program product identifier;
- (ii) a computer hardware identifier;
- (iii) a scanner engine program version identifier; and
- (iv) a malware definition data version identifier.

12. A computer program product as claimed in claim 1, wherein said malware scanner serves to detects one or more of:

- (i) a computer virus;
- (ii) a Trojan computer program;
- (iii) a worm computer program;
- (iv) a banned computer program; and

- (v) banned content within a e-mail.

13. A method of alerting an out-of-date update status of a malware scanner, said
5 method comprising the steps of:

- (i) reading an update status field associated with a computer file to be
scanned by a current malware scanner, said update status field being indicative of an
update status of a previous malware scanner that has scanned said computer file and
associated said update status field with said computer file;
- 10 (ii) comparing said update status of said previous malware scanner with an
update status of said current malware scanner; and
- (iii) if said update status of said current malware scanner does not match
said update status of said previous malware scanner, then issuing an update status
alert indicative of an out-of-date update status for whichever one of said current
15 malware scanner and said previous malware scanner has a most out-of-date update
status.

14. A method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said update status field is included
as a property field within said computer file.

15. A method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said update status field is included
within an update status file passed together and associated with said computer file
between malware scanners.

16. A method as claimed in claim 15, wherein said update status file and said
computer file are combined into a combined file that is passed as a single entity
between malware scanners.

17. A method as claimed in claim 16, wherein said combined file is a file
30 compressed combination of said update status file and said computer file.

18. A method as claimed in claim 13, wherein, if said current malware scanner has
a less out-of-date update status than said previous malware scanner, then said update

status field associated with said computer file is changed to correspond to said current malware scanner.

19. A method as claimed in claim 18, wherein changes to said update status field
5 are logged in an update status tracking database.

20. A method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said update status alert includes one or more of:

- (i) a user alert issued on whichever one of said current malware scanner
10 and said previous malware scanner has a most out-of-date update status; and
- (ii) an administrator alert issued to an administrator of whichever one of said current malware scanner and said previous malware scanner has a most out-of-date update status.

21. A method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said computer file is an e-mail
15 attachment.

22. A method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said current malware scanner and said previous malware scanner are part of a tiered malware scanner.

23. A method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said update status field includes one or more of:

- (i) a malware scanner computer program product identifier;
- (ii) a computer hardware identifier;
- 25 (iii) a scanner engine program version identifier; and
- (iv) a malware definition data version identifier.

24. A method as claimed in claim 13, wherein said malware scanner serves to detects one or more of:

- 30 (i) a computer virus;
- (ii) a Trojan computer program;
- (iii) a worm computer program;
- (iv) a banned computer program; and
- (v) banned content within a e-mail.

25. Apparatus for issuing an alert for an out-of-date update status of a malware scanner, said apparatus comprising:

- 5 (i) a reader operable to read an update status field associated with a computer file to be scanned by a current malware scanner, said update status field being indicative of an update status of a previous malware scanner that has scanned said computer file and associated said update status field with said computer file;
- (ii) a comparator operable to compare said update status of said previous malware scanner with an update status of said current malware scanner; and
- 10 (iii) an alert issuer operable if said update status of said current malware scanner does not match said update status of said previous malware scanner to issue an update status alert indicative of an out-of-date update status for whichever one of said current malware scanner and said previous malware scanner has a most out-of-date update status.

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26. Apparatus as claimed in claim 25, wherein said update status field is included as a property field within said computer file.

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27. Apparatus as claimed in claim 25, wherein said update status field is included within an update status file passed together and associated with said computer file between malware scanners.

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28. Apparatus as claimed in claim 27, wherein said update status file and said computer file are combined into a combined file that is passed as a single entity between malware scanners.

29. Apparatus as claimed in claim 28, wherein said combined file is a file compressed combination of said update status file and said computer file.

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30. Apparatus as claimed in claim 25, wherein, if said current malware scanner has a less out-of-date update status than said previous malware scanner, then said update status field associated with said computer file is changed to correspond to said current malware scanner.

31. Apparatus as claimed in claim 30, wherein changes to said update status field are logged in an update status tracking database.

32. Apparatus as claimed in claim 25, wherein said update status alert includes one or more of:

- (i) a user alert issued on whichever one of said current malware scanner and said previous malware scanner has a most out-of-date update status; and
- (ii) an administrator alert issued to an administrator of whichever one of said current malware scanner and said previous malware scanner has a most out-of-date update status.

33. Apparatus as claimed in claim 25, wherein said computer file is an e-mail attachment.

34. Apparatus as claimed in claim 25, wherein said current malware scanner and said previous malware scanner are part of a tiered malware scanner.

35. Apparatus as claimed in claim 25, wherein said update status field includes one or more of:

- (i) a malware scanner computer program product identifier;
- (ii) a computer hardware identifier;
- (iii) a scanner engine program version identifier; and
- (iv) a malware definition data version identifier.

36. Apparatus as claimed in claim 25, wherein said malware scanner serves to detects one or more of:

- (i) a computer virus;
- (ii) a Trojan computer program;
- (iii) a worm computer program;
- (iv) a banned computer program; and
- (v) banned content within a e-mail.